

FAMILY LIFE

The family was an important part of Roman life, and most Romans took their duty to their families very seriously. Families were larger than we are used to today, and normally included the head of the family - known as the *paterfamilias* - his wife and children, his sons' wives and children, and all their slaves.

A FATHER'S POWER

It was a father's duty to look after his family and lead their worship of the household gods (see page 329). During the Republic, the *paterfamilias* was a very powerful figure. He had the right to whip or imprison his children, and could even put them to death or sell them as slaves. But most fathers were affectionate parents, and during the Empire it became a crime for a father to sell or execute his children.

CLIENTS AND PATRONS

As well as the family members who lived with him, a wealthy Roman would also have lots of supporters - or clients - who relied on his help. He was known as their patron. Clients were expected to visit their patron every morning, accompany him whenever he went out, and vote for him if he decided to enter politics. In return, he would sometimes lend his clients money, help them with their careers and occasionally ask them to dinner.

WEDDINGS...

Young Romans didn't have very much choice about who they got married to. Their parents usually chose husbands or wives for them - often in order to make an alliance with another powerful or wealthy family. Girls could get married at the age of 12, but their husbands were often much older than this. When a couple became engaged, a family party was held, and the girl was given a ring for the third finger of her left hand.



An engagement ring engraved with two clasped hands

A 19th century artist's impression of a couple making offerings on their wedding day

